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FROM USMISSION TO UNESCO

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SUBJECT: USUNESO - AMBASSADOR'S DECEMBER 2 LUNCH WITH THE AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR

1. Ambassador Oliver attended a lunch December 2 hosted by the Austrian ambassador to UNESCO Harald Wiesner. The 11 guests were from other delegations and the UNESCO secretariat and included Monsignor Follo, the Holy See observer, the ambassadors of Lithuania, Russia, and Serbia-Montenegro, the Thai Deputy, Francoise Riviere and Katerina Stenou from the UNESCO Secretariat, and a member of his office staff.

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Highlights of the conversation were as follows:

2. In response to a question from Ambassador Oliver, about what he planned to do when Austria took over the EU Presidency on January 1 and how he was preparing for that, Wiesner said he had done nothing thus far and really had no plans yet. He added that Austria removed their ambassador from their UNESCO mission several years ago because they did not consider UNESCO to be of much value. He was asked last summer to go to Paris and revive the position. (Comment: Wiesner was clearly assigned as part of Austria's assumption of the EU Presidency which, given the recent success the EU had has at UNESCO, means that the EU will probably continue to focus on initiatives at UNESCO. We know that the EU members continue to have regular policy coordination meetings.) The ambassador from Serbia-Montenegro later told Ambassador Oliver that everyone knew that others would set the EU agenda, not the Austrians.

3. The Russian ambassador discussed three issues in a one-on-one conversation with Ambassador Oliver, saying every now and then, "Let me be frank with you". The first was Iraq, where he said that although Russia could not say it publicly, they understood and agreed that the US could not withdraw from Iraq, as chaos would follow. He added that was the same situation they had in Chechnya. He then asked Ambassador Oliver about the situation with China and Taiwan and wondered how the US was going to deal with that in the long run. Finally he discussed the role of NGO's at UNESCO in terms of UNESCO's NGO committee and said that the Chairman of the NGO Committee had to decide what the committee should focus on. When Ambassador Oliver asked him about the issue of NGO's in Russia, he said that the reason for the new regulations is to make sure that the NGO's actually do the jobs they claim that they do as the government feels that there are NGO's that are not being open and transparent about their organizations and/or work.

4. Monsignor Follo talked about a symposium that the Holy See mission is going to sponsor next week and said that it was part of the Vatican's long-time interest in promoting dialogue.

5. Ambassador Oliver asked the ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro about the rumor concerning his desire to change the composition of the geographic electoral groups. He said that the rumor was true. He said that Group II had three sets of countries--EU countries, Southeastern Europe, and former Soviet bloc. He said that the EU countries win all the elections, which is why the Czech Republic is on seven committees and is the Vice-Chairman for Group II at the Executive Board. That is unfair to the other non-EU countries in Group II, plus it gives control to the EU of both Group I and Group II. He said that he had tried to persuade Group II to establish a rotation system between the three groups of countries. That idea was completely rejected because, he said, the Group II EU countries like their position of power. Now he is going to push to eliminate Group II altogether and put all the EU countries in one group. He intends to do this using the resolution passed at the General Conference that asks the President of the General Conference to review UNESCO's geographic groups and propose possible changes. (Comment: Obviously if Group II, is eliminated, there will be changes in Group I, which may strengthen the position of those countries in Group III (GRULAG), particularly some of the islands in the Caribbean, who do not like being dominated by Latin

America and are interested in creating a new Group of the Americas.)

16. The ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro added that some Group I countries are very unhappy that Israel was elected to four UNESCO committees. Last fall there was general agreement in Group I that Israel should be elected to a couple of committees, but it seems there are some countries that did not want them to get so many. (Comment: We do not know if this is related to the threats that Israel received during the cultural diversity convention negotiating process when they were told that voting with the US against the convention would result in the loss of votes for UNESCO committees--particularly for the World Heritage Committee. Clearly that did not happen, and we suspect that has irritated some countries.)

17. Francoise Riviere, UNESCO's chef de cabinet, at the rank of Assistant Director General, was very quiet during lunch. Although it is widely known at UNESCO that she has applied to be the new ADG for Culture, it was never discussed at lunch. In fact the word "culture" was never mentioned publicly, though perhaps cultural issues were discussed in private conversations. (Comment: Perhaps that subject was avoided because of Ambassador Oliver's presence at the table.)

OLIVER